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PARIS FOR ARS (DWINTON)
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SUBJECT: US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS CAPTURE MINDS AND HEARTS OF
MALIAN AUDIENCES

REF: A.) BAMAKO 793 B.) BAMAKO 574 C.) BAMAKO 875

¶1. Summary: U.S. Embassy Bamako's public outreach on the 2008 Presidential elections began in May 2008 in the northern city of Gao and culminated in a festive election night party attended by several hundred Malian notables on November 4. The election night party attracted many of Mali's senior Muslim leaders, who were clearly captivated by the U.S. electoral process. The Embassy continues to receive a steady stream of congratulatory letters that praise the American process and people, as well as wish President-elect Obama every success in his tenure in office. End Summary.

Malian Interest in U.S. Politics

¶2. The long US electoral campaign captivated Malian audiences and provided important opportunities for public outreach on American history and government, in addition to active debates on race and gender relations in America. PAS Bamako began targeted outreach on the electoral process in May 2008 at the American Corner in Gao with a lecture on U.S. Presidential Elections and a week-long film festival which celebrated American political life. Over 300 students, journalists, and professors attended the lecture, while close to 100 people attended the films each night. As part of the Embassy's in-house speaker program, the Pol/Cons Officer addressed an audience of 100 Malian university students in Bamako on the U.S. elections.

¶3. In August 2008, ARS Speaker Steven Ekovich (Ref. A) presented a series of lectures to Malian audiences on subjects including the U.S. Political System, the electoral process, and the upcoming Presidential elections. In addition to carefully presenting a very balanced discussion of the relative strengths and weaknesses of each of the two major parties and its candidates, Dr. Ekovich skillfully crafted each of his lectures to address the important roles that different sectors of a country's population play in the democratic process, further highlighting the shared values between Malians and Americans.

¶4. In September 2008, Malian journalist Alassane Soulemaye participated in an FPC tour on "The First 2008 U.S. Presidential Debate," providing timely, accurate and positive coverage of the elections on Malian national radio. In October 2008, PAS Bamako worked with the most popular private radio station, Radio Kledu, to provide weekly interviews on the U.S. elections. Participants in the radio programs included Dr. Ekovich (reporting from Paris), the DCM, the PAO, and several American Fulbrighters in Mali. A principle journalist from Radio Kledu also participated in the FPC Election 2008 Visiting Journalists Program Embed tour, providing "live coverage" for Malian audiences. DCM Leonard additionally participated in two separate television interviews on the elections, one on regional television AFRICABLE (with an audience of 50 million) and on Malian national television (which covers 80% of

Malian territory). Also in October 2008, PAS provided a small grant to help offset the travel of an important Malian television personality, Salif Sanogo, who covered the elections from Washington.

Election Night Festivities

¶5. On November 4, the Embassy culminated its outreach efforts with a festive and interactive Election night party. Over 200 guests, representing a broad cross section of party leaders, religious figures, academics, and USG program alumni, shared the US election experience through a variety of activities. In addition to a super-sized video screen broadcasting live election coverage, the event offered guests the opportunity to browse IIP literature on the candidates, ask embassy officers questions about American elections, hear mini-lectures on the Electoral College, and view podcasts and interactive internet sites covering a variety of election-oriented topics. Many invitees posed for pictures with life-sized figures of the candidates and took the opportunity to cast a secret ballot for the candidate ticket of their choice.

¶6. The party was the occasion for the newly arrived Ambassador to emphasize America's 200 year unbroken tradition of peaceful transitions and our allegiance to a process, rather than a personality. Echoing the sentiment of many of our guests, the Malian press praised the event in wide media coverage, noting the varied participation of notable Malian political, judicial, and religious leaders and the festive environment created by the Embassy staff. The voting booth that allowed guests to symbolically experience the selection process "as if they were themselves

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American citizens" made a particular impact.

Local Religious Leaders

¶7. The election night was particularly well-attended by Mali's religious leaders, including senior members of Mali's Christian and Muslim communities. Christian leaders Jean Marie Traore and Timothy Diallo, along with senior members of the High Islamic Council (HCIM), spent several hours at the event discussing the American electoral process. Although Malian Imams generally shy away from questions of national politics, members of the HCIM were clearly fascinated by the American presidential race. Their presence was also a strong indicator of the success of the Embassy's outreach program and of senior Malian Muslim leaders' comfort level with Americans. The participation of Cherif Ousmane Madani Haidara (arguably Mali's most recognizable Muslim leader, frequently appearing on television and radio broadcasts participation) was particularly noteworthy (Ref. B).

Post-Election Congratulations

¶8. The November 6 editions of Malian newspapers provided euphoric coverage of the election of the first African American president. Many of the newspapers dedicated numerous pages to the subject and featured interviews with a wide variety of Malian notables. Almost all interlocutors praised the wisdom and "maturity" of the American people and admired the strength of our political process and social progress. These same sentiments have been expressed widely to Embassy employees via countless e-mails, phone calls, text messages, and letters from President Amadou Toumani Toure (Ref. C) down to regular people on the street. Perhaps the most touching letter came from an unknown businessman who wrote to the Ambassador the following message:

Begin (translated) text. "It is with a heart full of courage and joy that I decided to write to you to express my deep happiness for this symbolic American victory. You have once again proven to the rest of the world, through these elections, that you are definitely

the leaders of the world. You deserve this title because you have always been an example. I would like to salute these model candidates who are not focused on either victory or defeat, but rather on the best interest of their beloved country. I hope that they will serve as an example for all other democratic leaders. I hope that Barak Obama is the President of change that can best respond to the needs of the American people and that he always keeps the interests of the American people as his primary focus. One more time - a great Bravo for the American people." End Text.
Milovanovic